The System of European Schools: State of play, Challenges and Perspectives

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The Committee on Culture and Education has adopted an own-initiative report by Ilana CICUREL (Renew, FR) on the system of European Schools: state of play, challenges and perspectives.

State of play and vision

Members pointed out that the unique European School System (ESS) has demonstrated its strengths and qualities since its creation in the 1950s, as shown, for example, by the recognition of the European Baccalaureate in all Member States and the steady growth in the number of accredited European Schools (AES). However, **serious governance, management and financing difficulties** persist, hampering the system's potential with negative consequences for the entire school community. These difficulties touch upon legal issues, resources, infrastructures, staff recruitment and elements of educational and pedagogical quality, thereby underscoring a profound need for reform.

The report stressed the need for a critical, in-depth assessment of all aspects of the ESS, and for reform to future-proof the system, expand its outreach activities and ensure that it serves as a model for the exchange of good practices across educational systems.

Members called on the European Schools' Board of Governors (BoG) to update the mission, principles and objectives of the ESS in the form of a **new 'ESS Charter'**. They called on the Commission to play a more active coordinating role, in particular to forge links between the EES and the European Education Area (EEA). They would like to see greater **accountability and transparency**, more parliamentary scrutiny and scrutiny, and better communication so that the EES and the European Baccalaureate are more visible and better understood at all levels.

Governance, management and legal issues

The report called on the Commission to carry out, before the end of 2024, a **thorough review of the governance and management structures of the EES** as a whole and of each institution in particular. It asked that this review examine the missions, responsibilities and structures in place at all levels, assess the independence of functions and possible conflicts of interest, and identify the regulatory issues that hamper the EES.

Members stressed the need to **streamline the Board of Governors' decision-making process** and increase its flexibility. They called for all management staff to have clear responsibilities, transparent decision-making, performance reviews every two years and training and development plans. Parliament should be able to monitor reforms and progress towards targets.

The Board of Governors is invited to: (i) assess compliance with health, safety and security standards in the schools; (ii) ensure that the contractual and working conditions of locally recruited teachers comply with EU and national employment legislation; (iii) amend the Staff Regulations and the General Rules of the European Schools to explicitly clarify the competences of the Complaints Board vis-à-vis national courts, ensuring that there is no gap in legal protection; (iv) put in place an independent ombudsperson to address complaints about maladministration and mediate in conflicts; and (v) develop a code of good administrative conduct for school management at all levels.

The report urged the Member States to meet their obligations vis-à-vis the ESS in full, particularly with regard to the secondment of qualified teachers and other educational staff and the provision of adequate infrastructure and called for a binding system of direct financial contributions to ensure greater flexibility and security for both the ESS and the Member States.

The Board of Governors is called upon to urgently address the **ongoing teacher shortages** and to provide a stable and fair employment situation for all by retain staff and reducing turnover, thereby preventing the brain drain. In this regard, Members called for additional resources and a strengthened and **fair employment package** for seconded and locally recruited staff alike, with **competitive remuneration**, more equal salaries for nursery, primary and secondary teachers, clarity about employment status and stability. They called for teachers and schools to be given a greater degree of autonomy and for the creation of new middle management posts focusing on quality teaching methods and programmes in schools.

Quality of education and teaching

Members advocated a series of measures to improve educational and teaching standards. For instance, they called on the Board of Governors and the Secretary-General's Office to develop a **strategy for continuous professional development** and an induction programme for teachers and other education staff across the EES by the end of 2024.

The report urged schools to take advantage of the opportunities offered by personalised learning. It called on the Board of Governors to implement a coherent, uniform and **systematic inclusion policy** across the EES. It called on the Board of Governors and the Secretary-General's Office to promote a safe learning environment in which no form of violence is permitted and to step up the fight against harassment and cyber-bullying in the EES.

Members stressed that it is essential to offer all pupils a full and high-quality educational experience, particularly in their mother tongue and for students without a language section. They called on the Boards of Governors to periodically review the teaching of a second and third language. They also called for current curricula to be updated to emphasise the European dimension.

Outlook

Lastly, Members asked for the financial contributions from the EU to the ESS to feature as a **separate budget line** in future EU budgets. They want the ESS to become a beacon for high-quality multilingual and multicultural education in Europe and beyond, demonstrating that being ‘united in diversity’ can also be a living reality in the educational sphere. They expressed the wish for the European Parliament to be represented on the Board of Governors.